

Stopping the Sale of Tobacco to Kids

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Tobacco Facts

Forty-five children in Washington start smoking every day. Surveys of adult smokers in Washington show that about half of them had first tried cigarettes by age 14, and 70 percent of them were smoking regularly before they left high school.

In Washington it is illegal for youth under the age of 18 to use or possess tobacco. It is also illegal for anyone to give tobacco to a person under the age of 18. The Department of Health Tobacco Prevention and Control Program supports the efforts of county and school tobacco prevention programs to restrict youth access to tobacco.

There are about 87,000 youth who smoke in Washington.

A broad approach to restricting availability

Community tobacco prevention programs and their partners, with the support of the state Tobacco Program, monitor tobacco sales, educate retailers and the community about tobacco sale and possession laws, and conduct on-site checks to ensure compliance with state law.

Percent of youth smoking by grade:
Grade 6 – 2 percent
Grade 8 – 7.8 percent
Grade 10 – 13 percent
Grade 12 – 19.7 percent

Retailer compliance checks and education

Federal law requires states to keep youth tobacco sales rates at or below 20 percent. Compliance with this requirement is measured through random checks of retailers during which kids attempt to buy tobacco. In 2005, Washington youth were able to purchase tobacco 9.8 percent of the time.

The Tobacco Program requires its local contractors to conduct compliance checks and educate retailers about the law. To help with this effort, the Tobacco Program and its partners provide retailers with information about tobacco sales, legal requirements, and display regulations, and show them how to help their employees comply with the law. Training is available for store employees from both Liquor Control Board and local tobacco prevention program staff.

Licensing and monitoring sales

The Tobacco Program works closely with the state Liquor Control Board to license tobacco retailers and ensure compliance with tobacco sales laws. In addition to compliance checks, the Liquor Control Board conducts on-site inspections to ensure that appropriate sign, compliance, and licensing requirements are met. The Liquor Control Board tracks and enforces violations, works with retailers to correct problems, and provides the support retailers need to successfully comply with the law. In addition, the Tobacco Program and Liquor Control Board track the distribution of free tobacco products in clubs and at events like fairs, concerts, and rodeos, and work with communities to ensure applicable laws and requirements are met.

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Visit the youth Web site at:
SeeThruTheSmoke.com

Find out more about
secondhand smoke:
SecondhandSmokesYou.com

Find out more about the
Tobacco Quit Line at:
www.quitline.com

For more information on
tobacco prevention:
www.doh.wa.gov/tobacco

Restricting social sources

As tobacco becomes more difficult to obtain from stores, kids turn to social sources, such as older friends, family members, and other adults to obtain tobacco. The Tobacco Program and its partners are producing new programs and informational materials to discourage adults from providing tobacco to minors. The department encourages local programs to try innovative approaches to limiting youth access to tobacco, such as Puyallup's TIES (Tobacco Intervention Education and Support) project in which local officials combine enforcement of youth possession laws, school policies, and public education to discourage youth from buying, possessing, and using tobacco.

A comprehensive approach to fighting tobacco use

Research shows that state anti-tobacco programs must be broad-based and comprehensive to be effective. Restricting youth access to tobacco is an effective strategy for reducing tobacco use among young people when it is combined with other elements of a comprehensive plan. In addition to supporting efforts to limit the availability of tobacco to kids, Washington's Tobacco Prevention and Control Program encourages smoke-free environments, provides services to help people quit, conducts public awareness and media campaigns, supports programs in communities and schools, and evaluates the effectiveness of its activities.